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AUTHOR Weaver, Charles N.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

In the fall of 1975, the job preferences of Black, Mexican American, and Anglo male college students were studied via a self-administered questionnaire distributed in all freshman orientation, social sciences, and English classes at St. Philip's College in San Antonio, Texas. The sample comprised 51% of the freshman class. Information was obtained on each respondent's sex, race-ethnicity, age, marital status, religious preference, strength of religious preference, family income, educational and occupational expectations, and father's education and occupation. The questionnaire included a series of broad opinion-seeking questions (i.e., "Would you continue to work if you were rich?" and "Is luck or hard work more important in becoming successful?") to get the student thinking in a context that would transcend any current full- or part-time jobs he might hold. The questionnaire also included the question, "Which of the following things would you most prefer in a job?--high income; no danger of being fired; working hours short, lots of free time; chances for promotion; work important and gives a feeling of accomplishment." Findings included: Mexican Americans preferred chances for promotion; Blacks were the most interested in high income; 40.2% of the Mexican Americans, 38.7% of the Anglos, and only 29.2% of the Blacks were concerned about the importance and meaningfulness of work; and there were only meager differences between the groups in their preferences for a job which offered no danger of being fired and short working hours. (NQ)

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# What Black and Mexican-American Male College Students Want from Their Future Jobs*

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Charles N. Weaver
Professor of Management
St. Mary's University at
San Antonio, Texas

Sandra L. Holmes
Assistant Professor of
Management
The University of Texas

Harvey H. Sundel
Assistant Professor of
Marketing
Metropolitan State College
Denver, Colorado 80204
(303) 629-3000

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ABSTRACT

An investigation of the job preferences of black, Mexican-American, and Anglo male college students shows that important differences do exist in the job preferences of these groups of respondents and that these differences do not always form the pattern one might expect given the socio-economic history of the groups. The results have valuable implications for management in its efforts to develop effective motivational programs for increasing numbers of minority group employees.

# What Black and Mexican-American Male College Students Want from Their Future Jobs

In an effort to comply with federal legislation, as well as support voluntary affirmative action programs, American businessmen are striving to provide employment for hundreds of thousands of persons who are members of minority groups. Initially, this effort was directed toward minority group persons who were socially and economically deprived, but it has broadened to encompass minority group members who are relatively well-off and better educated. As managers have had to deal with increasing numbers of college-trained minority group applicants, concern about the effectiveness of present company programs of induction, training, and motivation has intensified. Managers need to know whether elements of present development programs should be modified to more effectively meet the needs and expectations of minority group employees.

In this paper we supply a small, albeit important, part of this critically important information. We examine one dimension of what black and Mexican-American male college students expect from their future jobs. This investigation should be particularly valuable to managers in the South and Southwest because, after the larger Anglo population, blacks and Mexican-Americans predominate in these areas.

## BACKGROUND

That the job expectations of black and Mexican-American college students should differ from the expectations of Anglo college students seems to follow from the considerable literature which documents important variations in the formative experiences of these three groups.

While blacks and Mexican-Americans share a common background of economic disadvantage as well as current and past discrimination, the sources of Mexican-American poverty are widely thought to be unique to the extent that this ethnic group is influenced by the culture which the Mexican immigrant brings to the United States. The concept, which appears repeatedly in the literature (5, 7, 14, 12) is that traditional Mexican culture and social organization hinder the economic and occupational advancement of Mexican-Americans. For instance, the culture is thought to place obligations to family above individual advancement and may make young adult Mexican-Americans less willing to leave their kin to go to other regions for better education or better job opportunities. The culture allegedly emphasizes the appreciation of things as they are and may thus inhibit mobility strivings. Furthermore, the culture allegedly is fatalistic and lacks strong future orientation, thereby lessening the Mexican-American's desire to plan for tomorrow and weakening his capacity to defer gratification, characteristics thought essential to economic advancement. A broader discussion of the alleged impact of Mexican folk-culture on the economic advancement of Mexican-Americans has been presented by Weaver and Glenn in a study of job performance (15).

A small amount of information exists which relates directly to the Mexican-American-Anglo dimension of this research, namely that the occupational aspirations of Mexican-American students are substantially lower than similar aspirations of Anglos. And among Anglo and Mexican-American students who aspire to white-collar positions, Mexican-Americans are reported to aim for the lower rungs of the white-collar ladder (4).

The literature is replete with evidence that blacks differ from the

larger population in a wide variety of characteristics. This literature points repeatedly to the blacks' disadvantaged socio-economic position (see Price, for example) and includes evidence of black-white differences in such areas as physical and motor development, psychophysical functions, intellectual functions, and family structure (2, 3). But from this plethora of knowledge the part which pertains most directly to the influences which affect the job preferences of black students suggests that they are less achievement-oriented than whites (6, 8, 9, 11). The senior author's own research (16), based on a comparison of black and white workers interviewed in two recent nationwide opinion surveys, shows that blacks are more than twice as likely to prefer that a job provide high income and less than half as likely to prefer a job for its meaningfulness and importance.

In the context of both the alleged and documented differences discussed above, it seems reasonable to expect variations in the preferences among job characteristics of black, Mexican-American, and Anglo college students. Three specific hypotheses about these variations arise from this literature to form the basis for the current investigation:

> Hypothesis One. Because of the low socio-economic status which they share, blacks and Mexican-Americans are more likely than Anglos to prefer high income from a list of alternative job characteristics.
>
> Hypothesis Two. Because of the history of discrimination shared by blacks and Mexican-Americans, members of these groups are more likely than Anglos to prefer a job which offers security from being fired.
>
> Hypothesis Three. Because of the reported sanctions against mobility striving in their unique rural-folk culture background, Mexican-Americans are less likely than either blacks or Anglos to prefer chances for advancement as a job characteristic.

## METHOD

In the fall of 1975, a self-administered questionnaire was distributed to students in all freshman orientation, social science, and English classes at St. Philip's College in San Antonio, Texas. The sample obtained comprised 51 percent of the freshman class. While there are systematic differences between the students who were in these classes and those who were not, such as a greater likelihood of commercial students not being in the sampled classes, none of these differences should significantly moderate the ethnic differences in the dependent variable since such factors affect each ethnic group proportionately.

In addition to securing a variety of attitudinal and demographic information from the unpaid respondents, the questionnaire included a slightly modified version of a question on job preferences first used by the University of Michigan in one of its Detroit Area Study Projects (13) and subsequently incorporated into the National Opinion Research Center's General Social Surveys (1):

Which of the following things would you most prefer in a job?

(A) High Income
(B) No danger of being fired
(C) Working hours short, lots of free time
(D) Chances for promotion
(E) Work important and gives a feeling of accomplishment

This question appeared on the questionnaire after a series of broad opinion-seeking questions (such as "Would you continue to work if you were rich?" and "Is luck or hard work more important in becoming successful?") so that the student-respondents probably were thinking in a context that would transcend any current full- or part-time jobs they

might hold.

Information from each respondent on sex, race-ethnicity, age, marital status, religious preference, strength of religious preferences, family income, educational and occupational expectations, father's education, and father's occupation made it possible to table analyze aggregate ethnic differences in job preferences so that the moderating effects of the influences indexed by these variables could be inspected.

## RESULTS

The overall preferences among five job characteristics of black, Mexican-American, and Anglo male college students are shown in Table 1, and the separation of the overall differences across the dimensions of nine other potentially moderating variables are shown in Table 2. Responses of the three racial-ethnic groups concerning each of the job preferences were separated across categories of each potentially moderating variable and tested for statistical significance by Chi-square. Differences which reached significance at the .05 level are described in the text discussion. In general, these cross tabulations revealed a number of broad patterns in job preferences which appear to be little affected by the nine moderator variables.

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Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

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Of the three ethnic groups, Mexican-Americans are most likely to prefer chances for promotion, with 32.9 percent of the Mexican-Americans selecting that characteristic as compared with 22.2 percent of the

blacks and 18.5 percent of the Anglos. Blacks were the most interested in high income, with 41.7 percent of the blacks, 20.1 percent of the Mexican-Americans, and 31.1 percent of the Anglos selecting high income as the first job preference. Mexican-Americans and Anglos are about equally concerned about the importance and meaningfulness of work, and both groups are considerably more concerned about this job characteristic than are blacks, with 40.2 percent of the Mexican-Americans, 38.7 percent of the Anglos, and only 29.2 percent of the blacks selecting meaningful work as their first job preference. Finally, there were only meager differences between Mexican-Americans, blacks, and Anglos in their preferences for a job which offers no danger of being fired and short working hours.

Mexican-Americans' greater preference for promotion and lesser preference for high income was independent of the effect of the nine moderator variables. The comparatively lesser concern of blacks (as compared with Mexican-Americans and Anglos) for important, meaningful work, as well as their relatively greater preference for high income, tended to disappear in categories of students 30 years of age or older, students with better educated fathers, and students from homes with annual incomes of $10,000 or more. In these categories of respondents, job preferences are similar across the three ethnic groups.

An interesting within-group variation was observed concerning the effects of the moderating variables upon Anglo preferences for a job with a high income. Both younger Anglos (16 to 19 years of age) and older Anglos (30 years of age or older) are more concerned than Anglos of other ages with high income, as are Anglos from families with a very

low family income of less than $5,000 annually.

## DISCUSSION

On the ground that Mexican-Americans and blacks, as groups, are socially and economically deprived in comparison with Anglos, it was hypothesized that these two minority groups would express differentially greater interest in high income as a job characteristic. Among the male college students in this sample, this hypothesis appears to be appropriate when the job preferences of blacks and Anglos are compared but inappropriate when comparison is made between Mexican-Americans and Anglos.

The greater preference among blacks for high income has been reported in another study (16) of a national sample of black and white fully-employed workers in which the author observed that

> The black worker's differentially higher preference for income and lower preference for interest and meaning in a job may, at least partially, be the result of what has been learned from a history of considerable insecurity in jobs in the less desirable occupational categories. Knowing that having a job is at best tenuous, the black worker may focus on the tangible, immediate security of income and be less mindful of the intrinsic satisfactions in his work, which are, in fact, comparatively few in the types of jobs blacks have traditionally held.

That black college students and experienced black workers share a high preference for high income suggests that the underlying forces which result in this attitude transcend the effect of work experience and may have become a part of black culture.

The second hypothesis, that blacks and Mexican-Americans would indicate greater preference than would Anglos for jobs with no chance of being fired, was not substantiated by the data. Students in all three groups exhibited a similar lack of preference for this job characteristic.

The greater preference of Mexican-Americans for chances for advancement

is inconsistent with the third hypothesis and is likewise inconsistent with a considerable amount of theory on the subject. Among the reasons why this inconsistency may have occurred are the following. First, the literature which forms the basis for much of the theory about Mexican-Americans has been intensively criticized on methodological grounds. Most of the few published books on the subject, while receiving wide attention, are based either on observation or on small, unrepresentative samples, and the methods of analysis used are usually crude. For instance, few of the studies control for the sources of correlated bias which usually exist in ethnic comparisons. Second, it is likely that the earlier studies, especially those which appeared in the 1950's or earlier, focused on Mexican-Americans who were first or second generation immigrants since their observations and samples were of adults. The subject of the present investigation, conducted in 1975, are relatively young and therefore likely to be at least third generation Mexican immigrants. Thus, generational differences may account for the inconsistencies between the present study and its antecedents if the sampled generation has been less affected by Mexican rural-folk culture and social organization and more affected by the urban, industrial culture of the United States. Third, it may be that these Mexican-American students represent a culturally differentiated segment of the larger Mexican-American population which is independent of generation or family income--since these data show that the greater preference of Mexican-Americans for promotion holds up across income categories.

## CONCLUSIONS

This investigation leads to several tentative conclusions which have

important implications for management in designing effective development or motivational programs for college-trained minority group males:

1. Important differences do exist in the job preferences of minority and nonminority males, and these differences do not always form the pattern one might expect given the socio-economic history of the minority group.

2. Blacks are most concerned about achieving a high income, while Mexican-Americans and Anglos are most concerned about having work that seems important and meaningful.

3. Anglos are more concerned than are Mexican-Americans about receiving a high income, but they are considerably less concerned than are blacks.

4. Mexican-Americans are much more concerned than either blacks or Anglos with having the opportunity for promotion.

5. Neither minority or nonminority college-trained males are highly interested in having a job with short working hours and little or no danger of being fired.

6. These patterns of differences hold up across categories of age, marital status, religious preference, strength of religion, family income, educational aspirations, occupational expectations, father's education, and father's occupation, with only a few exceptions. Males who are 30 years of age or older, males who have an annual family income of $10,000 or more, and males whose fathers have more than a high school education tend to have similar job preferences regardless of their ethnic or racial background, with the exception of the Mexican-Americans' heightened concern for promotion which holds across all these variables.

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Table 1

Preferences Among Job Characteristics by Black, Mexican-American, and Anglo Male College Students

| | Black | Mexican-American | Anglo |
|---|---|---|---|
| Income | 41.7% | 20.1% | 31.1% |
| Security | 2.8 | 5.5 | 4.8 |
| Short hours | 1.2 | 3.5 | 4.8 |
| Promotion | 22.2 | 32.9 | 18.5 |
| Meaningful work | 29.2 | 40.2 | 38.7 |
| (Cases) | (164) | (144) | (124) |

$X^2=25.80$, df=8, $p<.0013$

Table 2

eference Among Job Characteristics by Mexican-American, Black, and Anglo Male College Students by Selected Variables

| Variable | Income | | | Security | | | Short Hours | | | Promotion | | | Work Important | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | %MA | %B | %A | %MA | %B | %A | %MA | %B | %A | %MA | %B | %A | %MA | %B | %A |
| **Age** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 16-19 | 17.6 | 45.2 | 47.2 | 9.8 | 5.5 | 2.8 | 3.9 | 2.7 | 2.8 | 37.3 | 20.5 | 16.7 | 31.4 | 26.0 | 30.6 |
| 20-23 | 27.3 | 54.8 | 32.4 | 3.0 | .0 | 8.1 | .0 | 9.7 | 8.1 | 33.3 | 19.4 | 13.5 | 36.4 | 16.1 | 37.8 |
| 24-29 | 15.4 | 46.7 | 20.0 | 5.1 | .0 | 10.0 | .0 | .0 | 10.0 | 25.6 | 26.7 | 20.0 | 53.8 | 26.7 | 40.0 |
| 30+ | 21.1 | 13.0 | 23.1 | 2.6 | .0 | 2.6 | .0 | .0 | 2.6 | 31.6 | 26.1 | 25.6 | 44.7 | 60.9 | 46.2 |
| **Marital Status** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Married | 23.9 | 29.7 | 28.0 | 3.0 | .0 | 6.0 | .0 | .0 | 8.0 | 29.9 | 24.3 | 22.0 | 43.3 | 45.9 | 36.0 |
| Wid.,Sep.,Div | 21.4 | 61.5 | 33.3 | 7.1 | .0 | 5.6 | .0 | 15.4 | .0 | 14.3 | 7.7 | 22.2 | 57.1 | 15.4 | 38.9 |
| Never Married | 16.9 | 43.6 | 37.5 | 7.2 | 4.3 | 3.6 | 2.4 | 3.2 | 3.6 | 38.6 | 23.4 | 14.3 | 34.9 | 25.5 | 41.1 |
| **Religion** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Protestant | .0 | 42.9 | 34.5 | .0 | [illegible] | 3.6 | .0 | 1.0 | 1.8 | 75.0 | 21.4 | 25.5 | 25.0 | 32.7 | 34.5 |
| Catholic | 20.4 | 40.0 | 31.3 | 6.1 | 5.0 | 6.3 | 1.4 | 5.0 | 8.3 | 32.0 | 15.0 | 14.6 | 40.1 | 35.0 | 39.6 |
| **Strength of Religion** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Not Very Strong | 17.0 | 33.3 | 28.3 | 5.7 | 2.8 | 9.4 | .0 | 8.3 | 5.7 | 39.6 | 33.3 | 22.6 | 37.7 | 22.2 | 34.0 |
| Somewhat Strong | 19.6 | 41.0 | 31.8 | 4.3 | 2.6 | .0 | 2.2 | 2.6 | 4.5 | 28.3 | 20.5 | 22.7 | 45.7 | 33.3 | 40.9 |
| Very Strong | 23.1 | 46.4 | 38.8 | 6.2 | 2.9 | 2.0 | 1.5 | 1.4 | 4.1 | 30.8 | 17.4 | 12.2 | 38.5 | 31.9 | 42.9 |
| **Family Income** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| < $5,000 | 12.9 | 48.7 | 75.0 | 9.7 | 7.7 | .0 | 3.2 | 2.6 | ..0 | 25.8 | 15.4 | 16.7 | 48.4 | 25.6 | 8.3 |
| $5000-9999 | 15.7 | 46.9 | 33.3 | 6.9 | 1.6 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 4.7 | 13.3 | 37.5 | 21.9 | 13.3 | 37.5 | 25.0 | 33.0 |
| $10000-14999 | 20.0 | 31.6 | 32.1 | .0 | .0 | .0 | .0 | .0 | .0 | 45.7 | 31.6 | 28.6 | 34.3 | 36.8 | 39.0 |
| **Educational Aspirations** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <A | 24.1 | 43.6 | 41.3 | 6.9 | 5.1 | 6.5 | 3.4 | 5.1 | .0 | 29.3 | 20.5 | 13.0 | 36.2 | 25.6 | 39.1 |
| >A | 20.0 | 35.8 | 32.1 | 4.4 | 1.9 | 7.1 | .0 | 3.8 | 10.7 | 35.6 | 24.5 | 17.9 | 40.0 | 34.0 | 32.1 |
| **Occupational Expectations** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Low | 22.0 | 41.0 | 39.5 | 7.3 | 5.1 | 2.6 | .0 | 2.6 | 7.9 | 34.1 | 15.4 | 10.5 | 36.6 | 35.9 | 39.5 |
| Medium | 21.9 | 40.6 | 31.4 | 6.3 | 1.6 | 8.6 | 3.1 | 3.1 | 5.7 | 28.1 | 28.1 | 20.0 | 40.6 | 26.6 | 34.3 |
| High | 17.2 | 43.9 | 29.4 | 3.4 | 2.4 | 3.9 | .0 | 4.9 | 2.0 | 36.2 | 19.5 | 23.5 | 43.1 | 29.3 | 41.2 |
| **Father's Education** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <HS | 18.8 | 30.8 | 30.0 | 6.3 | 5.1 | 2.5 | 1.3 | 5.1 | 5.0 | 31.3 | 23.1 | 20.0 | 42.5 | 35.9 | 42.5 |
| HS | 21.2 | 45.0 | 25.9 | 6.1 | 2.5 | 3.7 | .0 | 2.5 | .0 | 30.3 | 22.5 | 14.8 | 42.4 | 27.5 | 55.6 |
| >HS | .0 | 31.8 | 25.0 | .0 | .0 | .0 | .0 | 4.5 | 10.0 | 60.0 | 9.1 | 30.0 | 40.0 | 54.5 | 35.0 |
| **Father's Occupation** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| White Collar | 22.2 | 33.8 | 28.0 | 3.7 | .0 | 2.0 | .0 | 2.2 | 6.0 | 29.6 | 19.6 | 14.0 | 44.4 | 34.8 | 50.0 |
| Craftsmen | 26.8 | 40.7 | 30.0 | 7.3 | 3.7 | 3.3 | .0 | 7.4 | 3.3 | 36.6 | 14.8 | 20.0 | 29.3 | 33.3 | 43.3 |
| Other Blue Collar | 17.9 | 29.5 | 30.0 | 6.0 | 4.5 | 5.0 | 3.0 | 2.3 | 5.0 | 31.3 | 31.8 | 35.0 | 41.8 | 31.3 | 25.0 |

Note: MA denotes Mexican-American, B denotes Black, and A denotes Anglo.